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District 6

“The Best Marriage I Know”

Marriage is something that I greatly look forward to. I hope that I will be blessed enough to have a marriage as wonderful as my grandparents'. They have been married for fifty-nine years and are still inseparable. They complement each other very well. There is so much to learn from them. They are constantly a great example to me and I will never be able to thank them enough for that.

My grandparents' names are Phil and Lou Neel, and they are my mom's parents. Phil was not a great student, though he was very talented. He sang in his band called the Hoot Owls and loved to draw. In his high school's "Who's Who" he was voted 'most likely to be the next *Grand Ole Opry* star'. Both Phil and Lou grew up on farms that were relatively close to each other. Of course, back then, close meant one or two miles away. They were not what we think of as the "All-American" couple, meeting, falling in love, and living happily ever after. Lou did not even want to date Phil at first. The irony of the situation is that she actually wanted to date his brother. Phil never gave up trying to win her heart because he felt she was worth the effort. Eventually, Lou gave Phil a chance and saw the kind of man he really was, and that is when they began to fall in love. Phil went to college at an art school in Birmingham and now he is a sports cartoonist. In fact, Auburn's mascot Aubie was created from the sports program he drew for the Auburn football games. Lou went to college at Montevallo and Phil would come down to visit her. They would take long walks just to talk and catch up with each other. They both loved poetry and reading. Lou is still an avid reader and Phil still loves to draw in his art room. They have four kids, fourteen grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren and love to be involved with the family. One of the things I like most about them is that they work hard at making everyone feel special.

One of the greatest things about their marriage is that they do nearly everything together. Every morning, even at their present age, they go to the gym together and work out. They attend church together, are involved in serving other people together, and they even make hospital visits together. When my grandmother cooks a meal for a family going through a rough time, my grandfather goes with her to deliver it. When Phil would coach his sons in athletics, Lou would always willingly keep score for the team. They do everything together, yet they know when to give the other one some space. They always support each other, even in the tough times. Two years before my mom was born, Lou gave birth to a baby boy who only lived an hour. For a month before the birth, to a month after the birth, Lou was completely confined to her bed. Her feet never touched the floor. Phil really had to step up to the plate to continue to raise their four and two-year-old as well as juggling a full time job and meeting Lou's needs. At this time, they did not even have a car; Phil rode the bus to work. From what I see now, Lou is always waiting on Phil hand and foot, but when you know their past, you can really see they just do what the other one needs.

There are so many things to learn from this amazing couple. They are both Christians and God's way is the center of their relationship. I think they love God and know He loves them, and that helps them love each other. Phil has a temper. He is always expecting a lot from himself and the people who surround him. Lou has a way of "rolling with the punches" and knowing when it is a good time to say something to him or just let him vent for a little while. They always try to talk their problems out. They can both kid each other without hurting each other. They pray together. What I see the most from my grandparents is that they try to love each other with all their hearts, 100%. They don't just give 50/50 and meet in the middle. They each put the other one first.

Phil and Lou Neel may have started out as an ordinary couple, but now they have an extraordinary marriage. They have given much to each other, but even more to every person who knows them. They are a great example of how a marriage that depends on God's principles can survive the struggles in life. I hope I will get to enjoy my future marriage the way my grandparents seem to enjoy theirs.